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Illinois Wesleyan University Adds Environmental Studies Major

May 10, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Effective with the fall semester of the 2005-2006 academic year, Illinois Wesleyan University will offer a major in Environmental Studies.

An Environmental Studies Program was established at IWU in 1999, when a minor in Environmental Studies became available, and students have been able to create a special major in the subject with assistance from faculty advisers in selecting coursework. Following approval by the University's Curriculum Council and faculty as a whole, the major is now available as an established plan of study.

"I think the demand for environmental studies as a major has grown significantly," said Associate Professor Abigail Jahiel, who directs the Environmental Studies program. "There's increasing recognition of the environment as an area for future jobs, and an area that really needs our attention."

Students will be able to choose from a general major in environmental studies or a concentration in one of five fields: ecology, environmental chemistry, environmental toxicology, environmental policy, or international environmental sustainability. The concentrations are designed especially for those who intend to pursue graduate education in related environmental fields, while the general major provides flexibility - for those interested in the environment but undecided in their specific career path - to develop a broad base of knowledge in the field.

The Environmental Studies program is interdisciplinary, involving diverse fields such as English, sociology, philosophy, and political science in addition to the natural sciences. As the major was developed, a team of faculty members determined four core areas that it should address: ecology, earth systems science, environmental ethics and the environment and society. Fourteen faculty members currently teach courses that fall under environmental studies, and Jahiel said that three courses will be added to those already being offered as the program becomes a major.

Given Harper, professor and chair of biology and associate director of Environmental Studies, said a number of prospective students have looked for an environmental studies major.

"I hope to be able to attract more environmentally minded students to Illinois Wesleyan," Harper said, adding that these students would boost on-campus environmental efforts. "I'm delighted that this (major) finally has come to fruition."

Jahiel noted the major helps fulfill Illinois Wesleyan's mission statement, which commits the University to environmental sustainability through its policies, programs and practices.

"I think that having the major will not only benefit those students who want to pursue the environment as their area of focus, but more broadly, (it will benefit) our environmental sustainability mission," Jahiel said. "We'll attract not only more students, but also more actively

engaged students,” who want to see changes that can be implemented “on the very practical, local level.”

To speak with Jahiel or Harper about the Environmental Studies major, contact Jeff Hanna or Ann Aubry at (309) 556-3181.